

U.S. Advises Moscow To 'Respect' Lithuania

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WASHINGTON, March 11 — The Bush Administration urged the Soviet Union today to respect the decision of the Lithuanian parliament to restore its sovereignty, but stopped short of an explicit statement of recognition of the newly declared government.

Noting instead that the United States had never recognized Soviet authority over Lithuania or the two other Baltic republics, officials urged nonviolence and said that only through negotiations with Moscow, not through unilateral action, would Lithuanians achieve what they want.

"The United States would urge the Soviet Government to respect the will of the citizens of Lithuania," the White House spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said in a statement.

He added: "We have consistently supported the Baltic people's inalienable right to peaceful self-determination. We call upon the Soviet Government to address its concerns and interests through immediate constructive negotiations with the government of

Washington feels no need to rant about the Baltics.

Lithuania. We hope that all parties will continue to avoid any initiation or encouragement of violence."

Avoiding Trouble for Gorbachev

Explaining the Administration's position, a senior official said it grows partly from the view that only through talks will the Lithuanians truly achieve their aims, and partly from the view that there is no reason to make matters worse for President Mikhail S. Gorbachev with defiant statements of support for the Baltics when the Soviet leader appears to be moving in the direction of setting them free anyway.

"Gorbachev has to accept the principle that the Baltic states are going to become independent and the Balts have to accept a process through which this independence can be peacefully and gradually negotiated," said an Administration official. "This is not an issue we intend to take the lead on. We will only get involved if invited by both sides."

The staff at the Lithuanian legation in Washington, sustained for years by Lithuanian gold reserves hidden in the United States, greeted today's news with unexpectedly mixed emotions.

To be sure, there was the triumphant clink of champagne glasses. But beneath the heady jubilation there was an undercurrent of sobriety — natural for a people who know Soviet power well enough not to celebrate as though today's vote were the end of the story.

"We went through a desert for so many years, no one ever believed in us, and now we have reached the oasis," said Stasys Lozoraitis Jr., the chargé d'affaires who has been representing a government that existed only in his peoples' memory for 50 years.

The United States first recognized an independent Republic of Lithuania in 1922 and never stopped recognizing it, despite the Soviet occupation in 1940.

Being a diplomat without a country is neither easy nor much fun, as evidenced by the dented Oldsmobile Omega that serves as Mr. Lozoraitis's official car. It was no surprise to hear him exude, "I am happy, very happy."

He was also quick to add: "But the story is not over. You see, I am a European. I know the Communists well. I know that the situation has changed radically — but, but, but. There are still many buts. Gorbachev could be replaced tomorrow. The Soviet economy is in horrible shape. We will have to negotiate with some very serious people in Moscow. We still don't control the banks, the police, the railway system. We don't even control the electricity yet. We will see now how the big brother reacts."

Saving the Best Champagne

In some ways those mixed emotions seemed to be displayed in the repast the legation laid out for today's reception: a single bottle of California Wine-master champagne, nestled between jugs of diet soda and surrounded by a few cookies, cakes and miniature yellow, green and red Lithuanian flags. Celebratory, but not too celebratory. The best champagne will wait.

Mr. Lozoraitis said today's statement by the White House met with his legation's approval for the moment. He said that "as soon as the Soviets hear the Americans declaring their support for our independence they will realize that if they try to stop it they will be going against the United States."

That the White House statement did not include overt recognition of the new government was also calculated, explained Lithuanian diplomats; they said their countrymen want to make sure that the new government is allowed by Moscow to take over the reins of power before they aggressively seek world recognition.

Asked whether the United States would establish diplomatic ties with Lithuania, the State Department spokeswoman, Margaret D. Tutwiler, said: "We recognized the independent state of Lithuania in 1922, and United States practice has been to establish formal relations with the lawful government of any state — once that government is in effective control of its territory and capable of entering into, and fulfilling, international obligations. When we are satisfied that the Lithuanian government can meet these requirements, we will establish formal diplomatic relations."